DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 509 EA 029 618

TITLE	Reflections on Re:Learning in Colorado: A Report for Educators.
INSTITUTION	Colorado State Dept. of Education, Denver.
PUB DATE	1997-03-00
NOTE	50p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
D SCRIPTORS	*Change Strategies; Curriculum Enrichment; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; High Schools; Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS	*Colorado; Curriculum Implementation; *Curriculum Theories

ABSTRACT

This report presents a composite picture of the experiences and patterns of change exhibited by six Colorado high schools after implementing the nine itemized principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, as espoused by Theodore Sizer in "Horace's Compromise." The nine principles are: intellectual focus, simple goals, universal goals, personalization, student-as-worker, diploma by exhibition, tone, staff, and budget. By using a variety of traditional and nontraditional performance indicators, each school underwent two independent reviews; one during the initial year, 1992-93, established a baseline, and the second, during 1995-96, provided a year-by-year analysis of the intervening years. A three-way partnership, known as Re:Learning, helps schools in 12 states redesign their teaching, learning, and administrative strategies in accordance with Coalition principles. In this partnership the Coalition of Essential Schools, based at Brown University, along with the Education Commission of the States, based in Denver, and the school's own state department of education work together to help foster school-level innovation and improvement. Section 1 briefly describes the six Colorado Re:Learning schools. Sections 2 through 4 examine the approaches taken by these schools and the changes brought about by their Re:Learning experiences. Section 5 looks at statewide and local efforts that support Re:Learning schools. Section 6 provides a look at the course of reform at the six schools. Finally, section 7 contains perspectives from the principals and coordinators regarding what they learned from the programs and how their commitments for the future have been affected. (RIB)

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REFLECTIONS ON RE:LEARNING IN COLORADO

A REPORT FOR EDUCATORS

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Colorado Department of Education

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REFLECTIONS ON RE:LEARNING IN COLORADO

A REPORT FOR EDUCATORS

MARCH 1997

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INTRODUCTION

A group of high school students meets on the first day of school. Their task is very clear – they must identify a product that will be their learning focus for the semester. They must set meaningful and realistic goals for their course of study and present the proposal to teachers for review. (Student-as-Planner)

The group decides to design and produce a video to inform the public about environmental problems in the region. Now that they have decided what the end result will be, they consider these questions: What skills and knowledge do we need to accomplish this task? What resources are available to us? What timeline will we need to complete this project on schedule? (Student-as-Manager)

The students are excited about the project and can't wait to get started. One is already on the phone requesting some background information from the Environmental Protection Agency. Another suggests developing a plan to market the video to environmental groups, local government agencies and citizen groups and using the money earned to contribute to environmental cleanup or remediation efforts. They will be meeting the next day with their community coaches (citizens and business leaders) to discuss these ideas. (Student-as-Entrepreneur)

After reviewing the students' plan, the English, science, social studies, math and fine arts teachers get together to coordinate instruction in a way that will support the students' learning goals. The teachers set these overall criteria: in the course of the project, students must build positive relationships among people, produce something tangible and of value, and demonstrate the new skills and knowledge they have gained. Teachers and students will work together to connect project goals to the new district standards and assessments. (Teacher-as-Coach)

The above description is an example of the type of dynamic and meaningful learning situation that six Colorado high schools are seeking to achieve. This report presents a composite picture of the experiences of these schools, each of which received funding from the Gates Family Foundation to implement the nine common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The report covers the time period from the 1992-93 school year through the 1995-96 school year.

The Coalition principles are based on a philosophy of education that sets helping students learn to use their minds well as the highest

priority of schooling, and emphasizes the importance of giving students and teachers room to work and learn in their own appropriate ways.

For Coalition schools, the challenge is to rethink every aspect of themselves in light of these priorities. They are expected to clearly define, for example, what it is that students – **all** students – should know and be able to do in order to leave school well-prepared for living, working, and learning in a changing world. They are expected to simplify, strengthen, and integrate the curriculum; change the way classes are structured and scheduled; revise grading and assessment practices; and work to create classroom environments that place students in the role of inquiring scholar, active learner, and hard worker. And, finally, they are expected to find a way to give teachers more collective planning time, smaller class loads, and expanded opportunities to learn new approaches and skills.

In Colorado and 11 other states, the efforts of individual schools to implement these principles are supported by a three-way partnership known as Re:Learning. In this partnership within each state, the Coalition of Essential Schools, based at Brown University, works with schools to help them redesign their teaching and learning strategies around the nine common principles. The other two partners – the Education Commission of the States (a nonprofit interstate compact based in Denver) and the state department of education – work together to rethink and redesign administrative structures, supports, regulations, and other major features of the education system in order to create a climate more hospitable to school-level innovation and improvement.

Re:Learning does not put forth or promote one-size-fits-all formulas or finished models of the perfectly redesigned school. Rather, it relies on each school to develop a plan – evolving from the combined efforts of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members – appropriate to its unique setting, needs, and circumstances. For a school to participate in Re:Learning, the entire staff typically votes on whether it is interested in being involved. Each teacher agrees to take an active role in reform or, if not, to at least refrain from sabotaging the effort.

Colorado joined the national Re:Learning network in 1991, supported by a $720,000 grant from the Gates Family Foundation to redesign the education system around the Coalition principles at both the state and local levels.[1] Within the six schools, most of the grant

money was used for teacher/administrator professional development, training, and planning time.

In 1992, the first four Colorado schools that joined Re:Learning made a commitment to document and evaluate the process of change at their schools over a four-year period.[2] Each school agreed to undergo two independent reviews, one during its initial year to gather baseline information and the other in the 1995-96 school year; to compile and analyze, year by year, a variety of traditional and non-traditional performance indicators; and to participate in the drafting and review of a final documentation report. The independent documentation team that visited the schools used questionnaires, classroom observations, and one-on-one interviews with teachers, administrators, policymakers, students, and parents to gather information about the process of change at each of the schools. This information was used to help interpret the yearly data gathered by the schools.

The following document represents a synthesis of the patterns of change found in the four schools, as well as the two additional schools that joined Colorado Re:Learning in 1993. This report, intended for professional educators, is complemented by a shorter report for the general public. This report supplements four school reports, each of which describes changes that occurred in one of the first four Colorado schools to participate in Re:Learning.

Section I of this report provides a brief description of the six Colorado Re:Learning schools. Sections II, III and IV offer a detailed look at the approach these schools have taken to reform, and the extent and impact of the changes that have occurred as a result of their experience with Re:Learning. Section V considers the Re:Learning work done at the state and district levels to support the schools. Section VI provides some reflections on the course of reform at the six schools. Section VII contains a perspective from the principals and Re:Learning coordinators about what they learned through these efforts to implement the nine common principles and statements concerning their commitments for the future.

SECTION I
A LOOK AT THE COLORADO RE:LEARNING SCHOOLS

At the end of the 1995-96 school year, the six Colorado high schools participating in the Re:Learning initiative were in varying stages of reform and facing different challenges. Below are brief descriptions of the six schools.

School #1. This school, with a student population of 1,100 and a teaching staff of 60, is located in a large, sparsely populated area surrounding a medium-sized Colorado city. The school undertook reform by focusing on the Coalition philosophy and providing broad-based professional development for the staff. As a result, many teachers are implementing the Coalition principles in their classrooms, and some of them have worked together to develop a "school-within-a-school." Recently, however, the election of new school board members resulted in a challenge to the district's philosophy, prompting the departure of several key administrators and leaving the future course of reform at the school uncertain.

School #2. Located in a rich agricultural area, this school has a teaching staff of 44 and a student population of 580, roughly half of whom are Hispanic. When the school began Re:Learning, the staff engaged in major struggles over philosophy and decision making, limiting the energy they had for reform. After the establishment of a workable decision-making process, one group of teachers was able to turn its attention to restructuring efforts, including integrating curriculum and setting up teaching teams. While progress has been made in these and other areas, the staff remains divided into two factions – one that continues to support reform, and one that is disillusioned with it or resistant to it.

School #3. Located in a predominantly blue-collar suburb of Denver, this school has slightly more than 1,000 students and a teaching staff of 55. The first two years of reform were marked by an increasing sense of energy and purpose, under the leadership of a principal who was strongly supportive of Re:Learning. When this principal left to take a job in another district, the change in leadership and power struggles between the staff and school and district administration plunged the school into a period of confusion. Despite these dynamics, considerable change has occurred – albeit in somewhat isolated pockets – at the classroom level. With many issues still

unresolved, this school has a new principal and the district a new superintendent for the 1996-97 school year.

School #4. This school is located in a small mountain town in Colorado. A teaching staff of 25 serves a student population of 440. The Coalition principles provided a substantial framework for change at this school, but after three years of Re:Learning, the staff decided to take a more independent approach to reform and declined further Re:Learning funding. The school worked to establish shared decision making, focused on high standards for students, and expanded strategies to help students achieve these standards. The staff continues to refine new methods and to tailor reform to school and student needs; rising enrollment creates new challenges.

School #5. Located in a Denver suburb, this school opened as a new school eight years ago. At the time, the staff was hired based on a shared philosophy that is compatible with the Coalition approach. The staff spent several years discussing the Coalition principles before opting to join Re:Learning. A new principal was hired recently who has beliefs that mesh closely with the staff's. Currently, the school has a teaching staff of 130 and a student enrollment of around 2,000. The school has core teams and an integrated curriculum in place for two grade levels with plans to expand the teams, although some teachers do not support this format.

School #6. Located in a small community on Colorado's Western Slope, this school has 28 teachers and a student enrollment of 370. Before joining the Coalition, some of the staff had experimented with content integration and block scheduling. Overall, the school takes an independent approach to reform and uses the Coalition as one of many sources for ideas. As part of a move toward shared decision making, staff members recently participated in hiring a new principal who has a Coalition background. Several factors lend uncertainty to the future – a superintendent who plans to retire soon, a budget crisis, multiple changes in the teaching staff, and growth in student enrollment.

What can we learn about school reform from the experience of these six schools? First, we must develop a clearer understanding of the common direction they are pursuing.

SECTION II
THE APPROACH TO REFORM

The six Colorado Re:Learning schools chose to use a Coalition approach to reform–one that allowed them to comprehensively rethink and redesign themselves around a defined set of principles for teaching and learning. Each school has operationalized the principles in its own way to improve student learning.

> *"The community and teachers are demanding more for all our students. We don't want kids coming out of school with the minimal amounts required; we want them to leave school with the most they can get out of it."*
> *–Teacher*

By joining Re:Learning, schools agree to carry out a rigorous course of self-study. Teachers and administrators are expected to meet regularly to discuss the Coalition principles, to explore how they might be used to improve teaching and learning, and to plan the changes needed to make improvements. They are to develop a consensus between staff and community and then implement agreed-upon changes. The principles focus their efforts on making the educational program more rigorous, requiring all students to engage in active, in-depth learning and to demonstrate the quality and breadth of their learning. The principles push teachers to forge a more personalized relationship with students and to actively promote a tone of decency and respect throughout the school. The whole is driven by a vision of improved learning for all students.

? What are the Coalition principles?

Schools that join Re:Learning agree to redesign their teaching and learning strategies – and the organizational structures that support them – in keeping with the nine common principles first espoused by Coalition of Essential Schools' chairman Theodore Sizer in his 1984 book *Horace's Compromise*. The principles are:

Intellectual Focus. The school should focus on helping students learn to use their minds well.

Simple Goals. Each student should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.

Universal Goals. The school's goals should apply to all students, although the means to the goals will vary.

What is a Coalition School?

Teacher: "A Coalition school is a school where kids can learn at a reasonable pace, demonstrate skills they have and apply them. A Coalition school gives students a purpose for their learning."

Administrator: "In a Coalition school, you'd see students actively involved, constantly seeking out information. There would be conversations in the hall focused on particular topics. There would be an environment of open autonomy. Each teacher would be extremely flexible in how students meet the standards for a course. You'd see content plus application."

Administrator: "A Coalition school is a small school with people who have a common vision of good schooling and who take a constructivist approach. Teachers work in teams and are responsible for the whole picture as well as their own discipline. A Coalition school is a school tied tightly to the community ... and is focused on higher-quality student learning."

Teacher: "A Coalition school is a quality place for learning where decisions are student-centered, where learning is meaningful to students and opens doors for them, and where there is a professional community that supports faculty growth."

Personalization. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum extent feasible. Decisions about curriculum, allocation of time, and choice of teaching materials must rest with the school's principal and staff.

Student-as-Worker. The governing metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, with teachers taking the role of coach, provoking students to learn how to learn and thus how to teach themselves.

Diploma by Exhibition. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery – an exhibition – of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program.

Tone. The tone of the school should explicitly stress values of trust and of decency. Parents should be treated as collaborators.

Staff. The principal and teachers should see themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in a particular discipline).

Budget. Budgets should support a student load of 80/1, time for collective planning, competitive salaries, and a per-pupil cost no more than 10% above that of traditional schools.

? Why did the six Colorado schools adopt Re:Learning as a way to reform?

In each case, the Colorado schools that joined Re:Learning were interested in making fundamental changes and improvements in the teaching and learning environment. Teachers had begun to realize that the traditional approach used in most schools works for some types of learning, but not for all types. They wanted to find the best ways to challenge students to think, apply their knowledge, and deal with complex problems – essential skills in today's world. Teachers wanted

to find ways to make learning more interesting and relevant to the situations faced by their students.

The schools appear to have initially chosen Re:Learning because it is a flexible approach to reform, and the primary focus is on teaching and learning. The Coalition principles help schools simultaneously develop greater intellectual focus and a "sense of community." Re:Learning does not promote a rigid set of methods, but rather is a general philosophy that each school and community can tailor to its needs. Although most of the schools joined the Coalition primarily to improve teaching and learning, several schools came aboard with a mixed agenda. Some people thought they could solve leadership, administrative, and decision-making problems through Re:Learning. For example, at one school, administrators wanted teachers to focus on making changes in the classroom, while some of the teachers were more interested in gaining decision-making power. In some cases, differing agendas spawned conflict and controversy.

Several of the schools used the Coalition principles to jump-start the process of change; others used them to add greater shape and focus to reform efforts already under way. As the schools progressed, they broadened their view to incorporate other resources and ideas outside of Re:Learning that were congruent with the Coalition principles.

As members of Re:Learning, the schools became part of established state and national networks that allowed them to make connections with other Coalition schools across the country.

? What does reform look like?

Since the ultimate purpose of the reform is to improve student learning, a good place to get an idea of what reform looks like is in the classroom. Here are some snapshots:

Class 1. In a US Government class, a small group of students are conducting a mock session of a Senate subcommittee meeting. They are debating the merits and weaknesses of an imaginary bill and making recommendations for revision.

Class 2. Students are writing short responses to a quote the English teacher has put on the board. Several volunteer to read their journal entries out loud. Their words are dramatic, poetic, and compelling in a way that gives depth and personal meaning to the subject at hand.

Class 3. Sitting at the front of the classroom are five full-sized dummies, each holding a briefcase. Students are promoting these

"candidates" for political office and they must present all the information they have compiled in the briefcases about taxes, foreign policy, gun control, and other campaign issues.

Class 4. In an Environmental Science class, six students are practicing shifting gears on road bikes that are mounted on immovable stands. Another group of students is developing criteria for the selection and purchase of bicycles. Others are demonstrating their knot-tying skills for the teacher.

Reform goes beyond what happens in the classroom. It affects many aspects of the schools, as seen in these examples:

Decision making. The staff at one school realized they needed to improve their decision-making skills. After several teachers attended a training course and brought information back to the staff, the school set up a representative council. Although the process was rough at first, shared decision making has taken hold at this school.

Student leadership. A student opens the meeting of the School Accountability Committee–a group comprising teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, community members, and other students. As president of this committee, the student leads a discussion about a recent school survey and how the results impact school goals.

Relationships. After feeling disrespect from, and considerable tension with, members of the local school board, a group of teachers sets up a work session with board members. They discuss protocol for teacher presentations at board meetings and give board members information about reform concepts and new teaching methods being used at the high school.

The six Colorado Re:Learning schools differ in how they have conceived of and implemented reform and restructuring, just as they differ in size, location, socioeconomic and ethnic makeup, history, and tradition. What they have in common is the goal of improved learning for all students, and a simple set of principles that give focus to their efforts. To implement the nine common principles, the schools chose to concentrate first and foremost on the beliefs and practices of the teachers.

SECTION III
THE EXTENT OF CHANGE

Think of your own attempts to make a change in your life, whether it's trying to improve your eating habits or training for a new career. While you are trying to change, you must carry on all your other activities and responsibilities as well.

Change is daunting for even one individual to manage; needless to say, it's considerably more complex and challenging in the case of a school, where the interests, skills, needs, and priorities of hundreds of different individuals – students, teachers, parents, administrators – must be taken into account. Add to this the fact that it takes time to shift habits and beliefs beyond a superficial level and ensure that changes will lead to constructive, lasting results.

? How can we look at reform in a way that makes sense?

Let's use three distinct lenses:

- The **philosophical** lens allows us to explore beliefs about reform and the Coalition's nine common principles.
- The **tactical** lens helps us examine organizational structures, new teaching methods, and changes in the classroom.
- The **political** lens allows us to focus on personal aspects of reform and the dynamics of power between various stakeholders.

In reality, these three perspectives blend together, but separately they provide us with the means to understand more clearly what is happening at the six Colorado Re:Learning schools. Since Re:Learning was initiated as a philosophically-based change effort, let's begin with the philosophical lens.

A PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW

? How have teachers changed their beliefs about teaching and learning?

Different people react to the prospect of change in different ways. Some are enthusiastic, others are more cautious, and still others are downright skeptical. When change involves a shift in thinking and the giving up of old philosophies for something new, the process can become difficult and ridden with tension.

Nearly all teachers and administrators in the six Colorado Re:Learning schools had the opportunity to participate in professional training to learn about the Coalition philosophy and methods. Roughly half of the staff at each of the six schools attended classes at Brown University and on-site workshops, visited other Coalition schools and/or went to Fall Forums, which are national gatherings sponsored by the Coalition. In several of the schools, teachers who were active participants shared their knowledge extensively with the rest of the staff through formal workshops and informal conversation.

One of the schools did not have an overall strategy for involving the total staff in Coalition training. This limited the spread of new ideas, and participation by selected teachers was perceived by some as favoritism. At another school, heavy teaching loads restricted the amount of time Coalition-trained teachers had for disseminating information.

Overall, acceptance and implementation of the Coalition philosophy by teachers at the six schools has been uneven. Teachers tend to cluster into three groups:

- **Advocates.** There is a core of teachers who were eager to try new ideas and be involved in the Coalition. These teachers have integrated the Coalition philosophy extensively in their classrooms and remain strong advocates of the approach. Approximately 15% to 30% of the teachers at each of the schools fall into this category.[3]
- The **Ambivalent Middle.** These teachers, roughly 50% to 75% of the total at each school, are more cautious and tend to make changes only after seeing some evidence of the success of a new approach. Some are neutral about reform and will only adopt changes that can be incorporated into existing class structures without a major investment of time or energy. Some teachers see themselves as simply unaffected. As one teacher said, "I think I'd be doing what I am doing with or without the Coalition."
- **Opponents.** This group includes teachers who either don't understand the new philosophy or don't agree with it. Some are hostile to any proposed reforms, while others are opposed specifically to the Coalition approach. Approximately 10% to 20% of the teachers at each of the schools fall into this category.

On a questionnaire administered to teachers at five of the six schools, teachers rated their belief in and use of the nine common principles. At each of the schools, responses were "moderate" to "strong" in support of most of the principles. On average, teachers rated their belief in and

use of a particular principle at about the same level, but at each school there were two or three principles that teachers believe in more than they actually put into practice. Belief in and use of one of the principles – teacher-as-generalist – was rated "moderate" to "poor" by all of the schools. Although belief in common planning time was rated high, its actual use was rated "moderate" to "poor" by all of the schools.

> *"The classes have become more intense, more creative, more demanding and more college-like." –Teacher*

In some of the Re:Learning schools, teachers have misunderstood or misapplied Coalition concepts in a way that works against reform. For example, the student-as-worker/teacher-as-coach principle has been misused by a few teachers to the point that it has generated negative reaction on the part of students and administrators.

However, when teachers apply the idea of student-as-worker/teacher-as-coach correctly, students realize that they must work harder and do more thinking on their own. They may grumble about it, but at least they understand the rationale. One student put it this way: "No one can pour knowledge into you. You must reach out for it and work for it because that is your job."

Across the schools, teachers generally lack a depth of understanding of teacher-as-generalist. Some interpret the concept to mean that teachers are required to be content experts in all subject areas. A more accurate picture of teacher-as-generalist can be portrayed in terms of "collective responsibility" – that all teachers are concerned about all aspects of learning for all students at their school. Although opposition to this principle may be motivated in part by teacher misconceptions, it also challenges many teachers' strong identification with their discipline.

> *"I think at times it's difficult for some teachers to understand that other teachers find change hard to deal with and hence bad feelings begin to fester among the staff." –Student*

Here are some of the things we observed in classrooms where the Coalition philosophy is being put into practice:

- Teachers present lessons that include in-depth coverage of a few topics, real-world applications, challenging questions and tasks, and knowledge integrated from a number of subjects.

- Teachers emphasize creative and critical thinking, cooperative learning, and student decision making.
- Teachers and students interact in a friendly and respectful manner. Teachers personalize instruction, maintain high standards, and encourage and support the success of all students.
- Students are actively engaged in learning tasks, set their own goals, take initiative, work independently, and offer ideas and opinions freely.

A TACTICAL VIEW

? What strategies and structures have the schools developed to support the philosophical changes?

The most common changes the Colorado Re:Learning schools have made are in five areas: professional development, teaching and testing methods, curriculum, school structures, and decision making. These strategies and tactics have helped move reform forward in the schools, but they have been undercut to some extent by three factors consistently identified as barriers to reform at all of the schools – insufficient teacher time for making changes, teaching loads that are too high, and low levels of parent/community participation.

Professional Development

All of the Colorado Re:Learning schools chose to use Gates Family Foundation funding primarily for professional development although they approached it in different ways. Those that made an effort to involve their entire staff in professional development activities as part of their reform tend to be the ones that have most extensively implemented the Coalition principles.

Here are some of the key elements of one school's approach that has proven to be effective:

- professional development opportunities for the entire staff and an environment that supports everyone in the process of change
- a push to move everyone along together toward reform, while at the

Small Steps to Change

Try it, reflect, and refine – this is one Re:Learning school's formula for making quality changes. The approach is this:

- Identify a problem that most people agree is important.
- Work on one or two things at a time and do not spread yourself too thin.
- Take small steps toward the solution of the problem.
- Refine strategies and learn them well before tackling the next new thing.
- Do not coerce staff participation in a new approach.

same time respecting the need for people to change at different paces

- reliance on a variety of sources for information and learning
- the combination of outside experts and staff-based trainers as learning resources
- an ongoing process to identify staff needs and appropriate learning opportunities to meet those needs
- the use of peer observation and feedback to improve teaching
- for new teachers, a clear definition of desired teaching methods and techniques

When it comes to professional development, the schools find that a one-day workshop here and there does not do the trick. Much more intensive strategies, such as those described above, are required to ensure that teachers have the understanding, confidence, and support they need to effectively apply new ideas and approaches.

> *"I have been given opportunities to thoughtfully examine my teaching practices and improve my ability to meet student needs. This was an invaluable opportunity for me and eventually for my students." –Teacher*

Teaching and Testing Methods

Innovative teaching and testing methods are in varying stages of development and use in all six of the Colorado Re:Learning schools. The most frequently used non-traditional methods are:

- hands-on activities (students learn by actively manipulating materials)
- cooperative learning (students work together in groups)
- student exhibitions (students present or demonstrate their learning to a group)

Hands-on and cooperative-learning strategies are techniques that have been around for quite some time and teachers may well have been familiar with these before the Coalition. However, the Coalition has encouraged greater attention to these methods. At one of the schools, assessments for almost every course include some kind of demonstration or exhibition. This is a more substantial departure from the norm.

Also being used, although less extensively, are the following new approaches to teaching and assessment:

- integrated curriculum (teachers combine instruction in several subject areas)
- portfolios (a continuously updated collection of samples of a student's best work)
- Socratic seminars (a format for in-depth group discussions)
- Foxfire methods (a focus on active group learning and student decision making)
- team teaching (teachers work together to instruct a group of students)

Some of these methods require a greater commitment of time or school-wide support to implement. For example, one school focused its reform effort on developing integrated classes, but found teachers needed a great deal of extra planning time to do this successfully. At another school, the English department took the initiative to link standards and portfolios before the school as a whole was ready to move in this direction. As teachers try new approaches and build their repertoire of teaching strategies, it becomes clear that using new methods does not guarantee good teaching. A new method cannot compensate if a teacher lacks the necessary content knowledge to go with it.

Here are several other strategies that some of the schools are using:

- "designing down" or "planning backward" (an approach to developing curriculum that starts by broadly identifying what students should know and be able to do, then proceeds to define, in greater detail, desired proficiencies and objectives)
- essential questions (a focus on compelling questions that challenge students to use their minds well and, in the process, gain and retain essential knowledge)
- interdisciplinary courses (teachers develop a course by bringing together information from a variety of content areas)
- 4/MAT techniques (adapting curriculum to diverse student learning styles)
- project-based learning/research (students access information and apply skills to study a compelling question or produce a creative product or solution)

Standards and Curriculum

During the four years that the schools were involved with Re:Learning, they were also developing new standards to define what

students should know and be able to do when they graduate from high school. While standards for student achievement are now required by state law, some of the Re:Learning schools began to develop standards before the law was passed. Educators at the six schools believe that the move to standards and the Coalition approach are complementary efforts that have been closely interwoven over the past few years. Standards can support the changes schools want to make in teaching and learning, and the Coalition provides a philosophical background to formulate and implement the standards.

Operating in conjunction, both standards and the Coalition leverage higher expectations for student achievement and call for increased academic rigor. In the six Re:Learning schools, there are teachers who challenge and support students in new ways. For example, at one school teachers in the English department decided to discontinue a course considered "easy" by students. In doing this the teachers made a firm commitment to help all students pass the more difficult English course they would be required to take instead.

> *"State legislation around the standards has really pushed people to be involved in a way that the Coalition wasn't pushing people."*
> *–Teacher*

Although some of the schools are farther along than others, at this point most have standards in place and are just now beginning to revise the curriculum and design new assessments to match. This will be a major challenge during the next few years. Although grant money has been available to support reform in teaching methods, the development or purchase of new curriculum materials will require a major investment of district funds. In some cases, it isn't clear whether districts will be willing or able to make such investments.

In several districts, teachers are being paid, on a limited basis, to incorporate the latest content knowledge into the school curriculum. But this is an enormous task and takes a great deal of time. For example, one of the Colorado Re:Learning schools – which opened as a new school in 1988 – has spent considerable time and effort on curriculum revision over the past several years. It has been a monumental undertaking to get a new core curriculum underway for two of the four grade levels and those curricula are still under development.

Personalized School Structures

Schools face complex challenges when it comes to teaching all students to use their minds well. With this in mind, all six of the Colorado Re:Learning schools, both large and small, have tried new structures as a way of improving the teaching and learning environment. Efforts in this area have focused primarily on scheduling and the creation of smaller school units, such as teaching teams or a "school-within-a-school," with the primary motivation being to help teachers get to know their students well and to make the content of learning more meaningful.

Block Schedule

One of the first changes all the Re:Learning schools made was to move from the traditional eight-period day to full- or partial-block scheduling, which provides fewer, but substantially longer, class periods. Two of the schools had already undergone this shift before joining the Coalition, and the other four made schedule changes during their first year of Re:Learning. Among the perceived benefits of block scheduling:

- The average teaching load generally decreases.
- Teachers have more time to work one-on-one with students.
- Teachers and students have more time to review material and cover it in depth.
- Teachers tend to rely less on textbooks and lectures and more on activities that promote student initiative and engagement.

Teaming and Small Schools

The larger Re:Learning schools have also tried changing their internal organization and structure – in some cases, to provide a more defined and personalized format or setting for implementing the Coalition principles. For example:

- One school is in the process of developing several smaller school units, each focused on a specific area of interest such as fine arts, math/science or careers/technology. The plan is to eventually have all students select a small school where they will take core subjects, meet standards, and do intensive study in a specialty area.
- Designed around the Coalition principles, one small school has been in operation at a Re:Learning school for two years. A team of teachers gives instruction in core subjects to ninth through twelfth

grade students who have chosen to be in the program. This small school is intended to serve as a model for expansion of the format.

- At another school, teachers are organized into six teams, each of them unique and each featuring an integrated curriculum. For example, one team teaches social studies, English and business to a group of seniors. Another integrates sophomore-level English, drama, speech, and fine arts.
- A fourth school has divided its faculty into core teaching teams that integrate basic curriculum for all ninth- and tenth-grade students. Core teams have low student/teacher ratios in order to help students adjust to the rigors of high school academics.

Two schools are already small enough that students and teachers know each other fairly well. They have not chosen to create smaller schools within the school although occasional team teaching occurs.

Shared Decision Making

Shared decision making is implicit in the Coalition principles, but not directly stated, and the Coalition does not tell schools how to set up a collaborative process.

In the early stages of reform, all of the Re:Learning schools created one or more entities to manage and guide the process of change. All of the schools had a Re:Learning Committee, one established a decision-making council, and another defined specific roles for a whole range of committees – scheduling, public relations, student advisory program, school climate, and the like. Committees were largely composed of teachers, with students and/or administrators sometimes involved.

Those schools that made an effort to train the entire staff in consensus-building and collaboration have typically had better results in terms of improving the decision-making process. Even in these schools, however, decision making remains a troublesome and sometimes volatile issue. At one of the six schools, the lack of a workable decision-making process emerged as a major barrier to reform. A protracted struggle to develop a shared-governance model divided the staff and, ultimately, led to a reversion on the part of the school administration to a more top-down management style.

Efforts to increase student participation in decision making have been, for the most part, limited and/or short-lived. Two of the schools included students on reform committees early in the process, and one of them has made considerable effort to keep students actively involved in decision making through membership on its School

Accountability Committee. At another school, students were not originally involved in the reform process, but more recently have been encouraged to submit proposals for changing programs and policies.

> *"Some of the infrastructure that created some unity in this building has been destroyed. Any one of those kinds of things [changes in leadership, decision making and school structure] would have been disruptive–all of them happening at one time has been downright devastating." –Teacher*

Impact of Organizational Factors on Reform

Some of the Re:Learning schools were experiencing problems that had to do with management and school organization while they were trying to reform teaching and learning. The concerns limited their ability to pursue their classroom-focused reform agenda. The organizational factors most often identified as impacting the extent of implementation are: leadership, planning, decision-making, orientation toward evaluation/reflection, level of trust on staff, and level of personal and professional commitment.

Conflict or weaknesses in any of the areas listed above tend to slow the pace of reform or result in pockets of change rather than school-wide change. On the other hand, if schools are building their organizational capacity at the same time they are reforming teaching and learning, change is reinforced and becomes more systemic.

A Political View

? What is the nature of the political climate around reform?

Within the small, close-knit communities, communication within the school and the district tends to be informal and, at the same time, effective simply because of the smaller number of people involved and informal leadership styles. Political differences are moderated through direct discussion, and there tends to be a closer linkage between what the community expects of schools and what schools expect of the community.

In the larger schools and districts, there is a greater diversity of stakeholders, interests, and issues. The political environment tends to be intense, dynamic, and sometimes highly inhospitable to reform.

At one of the larger schools, the first three years of Re:Learning went quite smoothly. Staff, students, and school and district administrators supported the focus on academic excellence and the

overall direction of reform. But the school neglected to communicate with the general public about many of the changes being made. During the third year of Re:Learning, the community elected a new majority on the school board which has a philosophy that differs sharply from the school's. As a result, the future of reform efforts at this school is uncertain.

Leadership - A Tenth Coalition Principle?

Leadership has such a significant impact on the course of reform that some people in the Re:Learning schools suggest the creation of a tenth Coalition principle focused on leadership. The experience of the six schools indicates that implementation of the Coalition principles is enhanced by a type of leadership that has these characteristics:

- Leaders have a personal commitment to the direction of reform and support innovation.
- Leaders are open to sharing power and support collaborative decision making.
- Within the school, leaders promote an atmosphere of inclusiveness among the staff and prevent it from dividing into groups of insiders and outsiders.
- Leaders are the "keepers" of the common vision and language, and hold this up as a torch for all to see.
- Leaders know the community and staff well and work to build a high level of mutual trust.
- Leaders model the level of dedication to improved student learning expected from others.

Another school was in the midst of a power struggle with the district over contractual issues at the time it joined Re:Learning. Disharmony tainted reform right from the start. When central administrators made top-down decisions about the school's structure, some of the staff felt these decisions undercut the grassroots work that had been done. The political climate became even more charged, and the focus on improving teaching and learning was greatly diminished.

When a school decides to make fundamental changes and teachers on staff have different educational philosophies, reform must be negotiated. Several of the schools were able to navigate through this stage by encouraging a full and open airing of issues and then focusing on areas of philosophical agreement. The Coalition principles gave some schools a way to frame discussions, engage in healthy debate, and build cohesion.

Other schools had a tougher time. The reform process, in some cases, amplified and exaggerated pre-existing conflicts, particularly over school management and organization issues, and greatly limited the ability of teachers and administrators to pursue their reform agenda.

For one of the Re:Learning schools, turnover in leadership was a major problem. The principal who had led the school through the early stages of reform was replaced by a principal who didn't share his support of the Coalition philosophy and who had a more directive

management style. This change had a highly disruptive effect on the school's reform efforts. In contrast, such problems didn't arise in the case of two other schools that experienced leadership changes during their involvement with Re:Learning. Consistent administrative leadership is valuable to have, but not a necessity if the new person is committed to the direction of reform and has effective leadership skills.

The political dynamics involve not only administrators, teachers, school boards and the community at large, but also students. On the whole, students have not been very involved in making decisions about the reforms. However, the seeds of this type of change are evident in some of the Re:Learning schools. For example:

- One School Accountability Committee has elected a student as chairperson and includes equal representation of staff, students, parents, and community members. The committee is mobilizing to counteract efforts by some in the community to derail reform.
- All-school, student-led seminars have brought business people into one school to present information to students, faculty, and community members.
- In several classes, students are taught how to work in groups and are gradually given more and more decision-making power about their course of study.
- Small schools are emerging that provide time for students to do intensive study in areas of their own choice.
- As a requirement for one social studies course, students attend meetings of local community organizations.

? What accounts for differences in the scope and pace of change at the six schools?

The experiences of the six Colorado Re:Learning schools suggest a set of factors that strengthen and contribute to the success of the reform process in general, and the Coalition approach in particular. They are:

- **Community support and involvement.** The school has strong connections with parents and the community.
- **Administrative support.** The district and school administration understand and support reform.
- **Professional community.** Teachers and administrators work together cooperatively and share responsibility for the learning of all students.

Factors That Support a Professional Community

Teachers have philosophical differences, but such differences are minimized in an environment that values and nurtures trust, respect, and an openness to new ideas. Factors that appear to support a strong professional community are:

- Educators have a deep commitment to the community, the school and their profession.
- The district administration and school board set a positive tone.
- The administration gives schools and staff leeway for professional discretion.
- Good communication and cooperation exists at all levels.
- Teachers feel their efforts on behalf of students are appreciated and recognized by the district and the community.
- Teachers feel a collaborative responsibility and mutual obligation for all students to succeed.
- There is an emphasis on teachers' learning as well as student learning.
- The staff can work through crisis and conflict in a constructive manner.
- The staff shares a number of fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning.

- **Degree of change.** The Coalition principles do not represent a radical shift from school norms.
- **School size.** Communication is simpler and more direct in small schools than in larger schools.[4]
- **Small schools/teams.** Teachers with a similar philosophy working together in small schools or teams provide in-depth, personalized learning for students.
- **Professional development.** Where professional development is multi-faceted and is a priority, new ideas and methods spread more readily and are implemented more effectively.
- **Leadership.** Leaders who support a common vision, provide sustained commitment, and promote inclusiveness enhance reform.
- **Decision making.** Decision making that actively involves a wide range of stakeholders is crucial to translating the Coalition principles into constructive, lasting change.
- **Connections.** The linking of reform to state policies involving standards and accountability, and the provision of greater access to reform networks, are key elements of the reform process.

SECTION IV
THE IMPACT OF RE:LEARNING

The primary goal of Re:Learning is to improve student achievement and promote a good learning environment for students. Re:Learning is also intended to change conditions for teachers and modify the general school climate. As is evident from the previous section, change is happening in pockets rather than being fully implemented across the schools. The extent and nature of the impacts for students, teachers, and the school are shaped by the fact that teachers' implementation of the Coalition principles has been uneven. Let's consider first the information available about impact on student achievement and attitudes. We will then turn our attention to the impact on teachers and the school as a whole.

? What effect has Re:Learning had on student achievement?

The impact on student achievement is considered in two categories: (1) school-wide measures of performance and participation and (2) classroom-specific evidence.

School-wide Measures

At the beginning of the initiative, the Colorado Re:Learning schools decided to collect this school-wide data over four years:

- Graduation rates
- Grade-point averages
- Course failure rates (by grade level)
- ACT scores
- District standardized test scores
- Scores on state writing and mathematics performance assessments
- Average daily attendance rates
- Dropout rates
- Discipline rates (percent of students with one or more suspensions)
- Post secondary education and training rates

Thus far, these measures of school-wide student impact have shown no consistent changes across all four schools. Individual schools tended to have minor improvements in one or two measures with others remaining the same or decreasing.

When the schools began their documentation, they had whole school change as their goal. They found the process of change to be much more difficult than anticipated. Since whole school change is yet to be achieved, it is not surprising that the above measures do not yet show much evidence of improvement. The schools now have several years of data to serve as a baseline for documentation of their next phase of reform.

However, two striking examples of change in student performance illustrate the potential impact of school policies that directly target student behavior.

Raising Expectations. Several years ago, the staff at one of the schools decided to establish higher goals and expectations for student achievement. Teachers developed specific standards and assessments for every course at the school. For several quarters after the new standards went into effect, the class failure rate increased. The teachers presented a solid front and stuck to their standards; eventually, students realized this was a serious change and their performance began to improve again. The teachers are beginning to see a different grade distribution curve in their classes as well. There is a small cluster of kids at the low end, not many in the middle, and quite a few at the high end. Kids in the middle group are steadily working their way toward A's and B's and into the top group. This is a positive trend, yet teachers are at a loss as to how to motivate the small group of students at the low end. These students tend to be ones who have major difficulties in other aspects of their lives and this detracts from their performance at school.

". . . implementation of the Coalition principles has been uneven, resulting in pockets of change rather than wide-spread reform." –Teacher

Standardized Testing Policy. In 1995, in an effort to learn more about student performance on standardized tests, one of the schools conducted a phone survey of students. Among other things, they learned that many students do not take standardized tests seriously. When asked how the school could get students to be more conscientious, kids said, "Make it mean something." So the school developed a new policy: if a student scores in the third stanine or below on a test, he or she is required to take a tutorial class in that subject area and forfeit an elective course. The new policy, which went into effect with the spring 1996 round of tests, appears to have had a dramatic

impact on scores. Overall, in each subject area, there was an increase of 5% to 20% more students who scored at or above the national average.

Classroom-Specific Evidence

In those classrooms where the Coalition principles have been actively implemented, teachers report increases in student skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- Critical thinking skills
- Cooperative learning and teamwork
- Skills that support self-directed learning; study habits
- Communication and presentation skills
- Skills in summarizing, dialogue, and debate
- Organizational and time-management skills
- Application of learning to real-world situations and problems
- Ability to work on integrated projects
- Ability to set specific learning goals
- Skills in accessing information
- Leadership and peer coaching skills

Formal measures of changes in these areas have not yet been established at the schools. Thus, data is not available on the extent of the changes in these areas. Rather, during the four years, teachers active in reform honed their own teaching practices and identified these areas of student learning as ones that need to be documented in the future. A group of teachers in each school is working on ways to measure these aspects of student learning. (For more specific examples of how these changes look in the classrooms, refer to the individual school reports on Re:Learning.)

What Students Say

For the most part, students are aware that some teachers are teaching differently and that expectations for students have changed. Reform directly impacts what students do and how they do it. Here is a sampling of students' comments about some of these changes:

Projects:

"Projects are graded on how we explain our thinking and if we get the right answer. We do more of that – explaining our thinking."

Portfolios:

"Having a portfolio allows me to see everything I am doing clearly ... and pinpoints my improvements."

Presentations:

"Giving presentations teaches you to have poise in front of a group of people. It teaches you to be a professional."

Personalization:

"Personalization is the ability of students and teachers to collaborate and develop an action plan for a student's learning that will enable him or her to succeed at the highest possible level."

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? How has Re:Learning impacted student attitudes?

Teachers at the six Re:Learning schools see these changes in their students as a result of reform efforts:

- Improved social skills; treating others with respect and dignity
- More positive attitude toward and interest in learning
- Greater self-esteem, confidence, and trust
- Greater respect for individual differences

The impact on students to date is more inconsistent and less extensive than what teachers and administrators would like to see. However, the small, incremental improvements in skills and attitudes appear to be positively correlated with teachers' implementation of the Coalition principles. This pattern indicates to them that the path is worth pursuing.

? How has Re:Learning affected teachers?

As noted earlier, teachers tend to cluster into three groups in terms of the extent to which Re:Learning has impacted them. A significant portion of teachers (one-quarter to one-third of the staff at most of the schools) are looking at teaching from a new vantage point and are exploring new practices and approaches. They are seeking a major overhaul in the way the school operates, based on implementation of all nine of the Coalition principles.

Typically, another half to three-quarters of the staff at each of the schools are finding ideas to bring into their classrooms that they believe will improve the quality of their teaching within the general confines of traditional structures. Within this group, some teachers adopt new techniques at a superficial level, which seems to produce little or no improvement in their teaching, while others are using them in more sophisticated ways with noticeable impact.

"The Coalition has impacted my learning tremendously. It has revolutionized my understanding of teaching." –Teacher

A fairly small percentage of teachers in most of the schools (10-20% or less) are strongly resistant to the ideas.

As a result of these differences, all six of the schools have experienced some level of tension among the staff. In some cases that tension has resulted in productive thinking and upgrades in teaching. In many

cases, however, it seems that teachers don't view new teaching methods as a way to expand their repertoire, but instead tend to polarize around one approach or another and try to convert everyone else.

Factors That Influence the Academic and Professional Climate

According to the survey of teachers at the six Colorado Re:Learning schools, the following factors support a healthy academic and professional climate:

- administrative support and leadership
- the Coalition principles
- new standards and assessments
- teacher training, staff support for change, peer dialogue, and staff cohesion
- community support
- effective communication
- block schedules, teaming, and committees

Negative factors, according to teachers, are: large classes; lack of time; uninvolved parents and unmotivated students; constant change and uncertainty; lack of leadership; limited staff development; and conflict over decision making.

Professional Climate

Reform has enhanced professional relations in the following ways, although to varying degrees across the schools:

- The staff has developed a greater degree of professional cohesion and a common understanding of new methods, even though teachers have philosophical differences and favor different teaching approaches.
- The culture of the school is shifting toward supporting risk-taking and innovation.
- The staff has a sense of collegiality and values the sharing of ideas and experiences.
- Teachers show tolerance and respect for diversity among the staff, and acknowledge that there are a variety of ways to teach and assess students.

At some schools, teachers feel the professional climate has diminished over the past few years because of staff conflict, political dynamics, and external factors that may or may not have been linked to the reform efforts.

Attitude Toward Students

Some staff members at the six schools say that Re:Learning has strengthened their belief that all students can learn, and learn well. As one administrator put it: "Everyone sees the need to develop good intellectual habits in students – even those teachers who are not sold on the Coalition philosophy." Also, in those schools where students have been actively involved in the

"The Coalition has affected the way I think, the way I teach, and the way I approach kids."
–Teacher

process of reform, there has been a marked improvement in the level of respect and trust between students and teachers.

? How has Re:Learning impacted schools?

It is too early to assess the full impact of Re:Learning on the schools. Clearly, some of the developments mentioned above – changes in teaching practices, student attitudes, and the like – have affected the internal dynamics and environment of the schools. Still, for the most part, there are only small groups of teachers and students who have experienced the positive aspects of reform.

Modest impact at this point is predictable. Not only are teachers still honing their new skills, but students are at the early stages of understanding their new roles and responsibilities. When change is not yet widespread in the school, students may not yet be convinced of the necessity of meeting higher expectations and standards.

Where is the Time?

Here are some examples of how teachers at the Colorado Re:Learning schools are addressing the time issue:

At one of the smaller schools, the staff is dedicated to helping all students achieve high standards. To accomplish this, they put in a lot of volunteer time tutoring one-on-one after school, mentoring, and participating in other student support programs. Faced with dramatically rising enrollment, this may not be a viable approach in the future.

At another school, the staff has been waging a battle with the school board over contractual issues, including planning time, class size, scheduling, and staff development. As one educator observed, "Until these issues are resolved, it is hard for the staff to be happy and to think about other things." With a recent change in district administration, the staff plans to put renewed energy into negotiating these issues.

Administrators at another school are generous in giving team teachers extra time to coordinate instruction. The teachers at yet another school are working harder and longer to create successful teams.

In many cases, the primary widespread impact of reform up to this point has been heightened awareness of the need for change. Along with this awareness comes fear and confusion for some, while for others it sparks creativity and productive dialogue. At several of the schools, the new awareness has had a positive effect; the staff has made an effort to face problems head on, engage in constructive dialogue, and find common ground around new teaching and learning strategies. Other schools have not been as successful in this area. It remains to be seen whether these schools will be able to move beyond conflicts and problems, and find a way to develop a shared vision and new modes of operation.

There are several factors that many people within schools view as major obstacles to reform, but which they feel powerless to change. The most frequently mentioned of these are large teaching

loads and the lack of adequate planning time for teachers. Teachers see these two factors as major constraints on their ability to implement new methods and approaches in the classroom, provide greater personalization, and improve student achievement. The lack of parental and community involvement also is frequently mentioned.

Student/teacher ratios and teacher time are controlled by district budgets and policies. Most people within schools don't feel they can do much to influence decisions in these areas without widespread public and political support. But reduced class load and increased planning time both involve budget adjustments, so it is difficult to garner this support.

SECTION V
THE RE:LEARNING SUPPORT STRUCTURE

Just as it is difficult for one person in a family to change her eating patterns when the rest of the family maintains old habits, so too it is difficult for a school to change its philosophy and structures when the district and state do not make changes in their policies and practices. As discussed in the Foreword to this report, Re:Learning was designed with this concept in mind.

? How does the state support schools involved in Re:Learning?

Colorado has two main elements that create a supportive atmosphere for participating schools - a coordinator within the Colorado Department of Education and a Re:Learning cadre.

COORDINATOR

The Colorado Department of Education provides a full-time coordinator who helps link the Re:Learning schools to the national Coalition network and helps schools access technical assistance and resources to rethink structures and the content of instruction. During the four years covered by this documentation effort, one of the coordinator's emphases was to work closely with the schools to design professional development opportunities for the schools focused on improved teaching and learning.

This was often done through connections to the national Coalition office. The basic orientation to professional development, however, is not about bringing in outside "experts" to give advice to the schools. Rather, the approach is to build networks both within and outside the state among schools and among teachers who are pursuing the nine common principles. The mechanisms for doing this include multi-day institutes for school teams, particularly during the summer months, and day-long seminars during the school year. Teachers and administrators from other Coalition schools often share their experiences with the Colorado schools, not as the ultimate answer, but as an example of one approach that is being used elsewhere.

The state coordinator facilitates the development of the Colorado Faculty. Using guidelines from the national Coalition office, the Re:Learning schools identify outstanding teachers committed to the nine common principles. These teachers obtain additional training and are then available to work with teachers in their own school and other schools in the state that are pursuing the Coalition approach.

The coordinator helped make arrangements for the Re:Learning schools to serve on one another's accreditation review teams and thus, to build in the nine common principles as criteria. The coordinator also set up, facilitated, and led cadre meetings.

RE:LEARNING CADRE

The Re:Learning cadre's goal is to support the work of the schools by attending to state policies and practices that may be inhibiting the schools' reform process. The cadre is composed of state, district, and school leaders. The membership is loosely defined; the cadre functions primarily as a forum for discussions around reform based on the nine common principles. The approach is in keeping with the flexible nature of the initiative and its emphasis on networking rather than hierarchical structures.

Over the course of the four years, both the composition and focus of the cadre shifted. During the initial year, the cadre attracted leaders of state-wide education associations, mid to upper level managers within the CDE, and representatives from the participating schools. Conversations tended to focus on understanding what Re:Learning is and helping people get acquainted with one another.

At one point in time the cadre explored links to other reform initiatives in the state that have a philosophy compatible with Re:Learning. During this phase, cadre meetings were often attended by administrators and teachers from other schools seeking possible connections.

The group waited for the schools to identify problems in state policy or practice that needed to be addressed. Indeed, a major problem soon was identified and in response, the cadre focused its energy on connecting high school graduation standards to college and university entrance requirements. The work of the cadre contributed to having several of the state's post-secondary institutions agree to revise admissions policies to take into account standards-based measures of achievement in addition to grade-point averages and other traditional measures.

During the latter part of the four years, the cadre's emphasis was (and continues to be) on how to build an ongoing means to provide professional development for teachers and principals once the Gates Family Foundation funding ends. As of this writing the cadre is looking closely at how to establish a Coalition regional center in Colorado that would facilitate learning among the Re:Learning schools.

The attendees at these meetings tend to be largely people from the participating schools rather than representatives of state education associations.

At key points during the four years, people active in the cadre were called on to testify before the Standards Council and a legislative committee dealing with the development of state standards and assessments.

Unlike some states involved in Re:Learning, the legislature does not provide funds specifically to support this reform initiative in the schools, and legislators have not built close connections to the effort.

? How do the districts support schools involved in Re:Learning?

Each district has had its own approach to supporting the schools. In all six cases, the districts provided some matching funds for the effort while receiving funds from the Gates Family Foundation. In some districts the superintendent has been actively involved whereas in other cases, other district administrators have been more active. In most of the districts, opportunities have been available for middle and elementary school teachers to become familiar with the principles and consider how they might adapt them for their situation. The extent to which the linkages to the middle and elementary schools has been encouraged varies considerably within the participating districts. The district office has tended to be the primary link with the school board and often with the community.

SECTION VI
REFLECTIONS

This report has painted a picture of how six Colorado high schools are striving to redesign themselves to promote higher student achievement and create a richer, more productive teaching and learning environment. Within each of these schools there are dedicated teachers and administrators who are actively working to implement new ideas and approaches, inspired by the possibilities and promise of whole-school change and improvement. Within each school there are also teachers going about their business in the usual way, willing to commit themselves only to those changes that can be made without a major investment of time and energy. And, finally, there are a small number of teachers who remain firmly opposed to anything that represents a departure from the traditional methods and modes of teaching.

After four years of hard work, the overall picture in the six Colorado Re:Learning schools is one of fairly limited evidence of achievement of the ultimate goal – improved student learning – and yet one of deep and irreversible change in the thinking and teaching of a core group of teachers. They are committed to continually pursuing the vision of a school based on the nine common principles that results in improved student learning. At the same time, three factors loom as major barriers to the schools' continued progress: lack of time, lack of resources to reduce teaching loads and lack of community involvement. These factors loom large for *any* change in the routines of schooling.

Although it is up to each school and its community to reflect on its progress and determine its next steps, we offer here a few comments about the overall patterns evident across the schools. We address two questions: Are schools implementing the nine common principles properly? Can the three big barriers of lack of time, resources and involvement be overcome? This section ends with questions that schools and their communities might consider as they shape their future.

? Are schools implementing the nine common principles properly?

The decision about what is the right way to implement the principles is a choice for each school and its community to make. There is no one right way.

In general, the strategy of the schools has been to focus first and foremost on the fundamental aspects of schooling – the daily teaching and learning that is shaped by teachers. The emphasis has been and continues to be on helping teachers take charge of rethinking their own learning as well as that of students. There are examples throughout this report of implementation being done "right" in this regard. Teachers are learning new methods, applying them in their classrooms, and using the Coalition principles to help redesign the teaching and learning environment. Major progress is being made toward breathing new life into the daily routines of schooling for a core group of teachers and students.

Respecting Differences

In one district, a segment of the community reacted strongly against reform and, as a result, the majority on the school board shifted to a back-to-basics philosophy. At the same time, a large number of people at the high school were committed to pursuing a reform agenda. What steps can be taken to cope with a situation in which people with differing philosophies must coexist?

One administrator suggested this approach: Let every group with a substantial base of support in the community have the opportunity to meet with district educators and develop schooling options that fit their needs. The fundamental idea is to honor and respect differences in the community and provide meaningful choices.

Within and across the schools, committed teachers and administrators are working on ways to extend and reinforce the power of these actions. They are evaluating their progress and finding new ways to achieve higher-quality implementation. Their goal is to move past superficial application and strive for more in-depth, quality use of such techniques.

The ragged, and sometimes superficial, implementation seen in the schools is to be expected; it's "right" in the sense that it takes time to make changes in long-standing patterns within a school. Each school now has new, small-scale teaching and learning models in operation and the staffs should soon be able to document the impact of these change units in a more definitive way.

At the same time, the patterns in these schools give the appearance that this way of teaching and learning works better for some teachers and students than for others. Does a school where the principles are not being fully implemented by all teachers represent a school divided within itself or does it represent an openness to diverse approaches? In a number of these schools, it appears that Re:Learning has polarized the teaching staff into competing factions. Different groups criticize each other and promote their way of working as the "best" way.

Meaningful change is more likely to occur when teachers expand their range of techniques and understand when and how different

philosophies of teaching are appropriate, rather than limit themselves. Successful teachers use multiple strategies to meet the diverse needs of students. A staff that has a deep understanding of different philosophies and knows how to support one another may be more likely to accomplish reform goals. It is a fragile balance between diversity that enriches and diversity that divides a school.

? Can the three big barriers of lack of time, resources and involvement be overcome?

Schools report three major barriers that are not being penetrated by their implementation of the nine common principles – lack of time, lack of resources to reduce teacher load and lack of community involvement. These three barriers have something in common – they are all highly dependent on major public support. Legislatures and school boards cannot allocate more resources to schools without a major increase in public support for the direction schools are taking.

If we look deeper, the lack of time and resources may be grounded in the nature of the connection between the school and its beneficiaries – students and the community. Re:Learning, as well as the nine common principles, tend to be focused primarily *within* the education system. Re:Learning takes a step beyond the school, recognizing that the structures at the district and state level need to be aligned with the nine common principles operating in the schools. However, neither Re:Learning nor the Coalition attend in a significant way to the need for a new relationship between the schools and their community. Although there is considerable talk of the need for community involvement, it is not happening in a major way at the six Colorado Re:Learning schools.

Super Saturday

In the spring of 1995, over 300 parents turned out for the high school's Super Saturday. Juniors and seniors provided public exhibitions of projects on the civil war, population growth, conflicts in the middle east, and a host of other topics.

A look at three models of how systems operate may provide clues to this dilemma.

The **hierarchical, bureaucratic model** uses top-down decision making and has fixed rules and regulations. It has been the predominant approach of most organizations in this country for many years. While it is the appropriate approach in the case of policies that need to be consistent – hiring practices and payroll management, for example – it traditionally has been applied across the board, covering a

wide range of functions within a given system. Underlying Re:Learning is the intention to reduce the presence of this model in the education system.

The **professional model** evolved as a by-product of the development of the service industry. The professional model relies on people with specialized knowledge and skills rather than hierarchical decision making. When this model is used in a school setting, teachers are the professionals with primary responsibility for defining what and how students learn and for providing the evidence that teaching and learning have been successful.

In the **community model** the beneficiaries of the professional model become active participants in decision making. For example, when this model is used in the schools, community members, parents, and students take the lead in identifying goals, working through choices, coming up with solutions, and creating the conditions and environments they believe would work best to promote learning.

Both the bureaucratic and professional models are institutionally based and have a strong element of *control*. The community model by contrast, emphasizes *consent*.

Generally in the Re:Learning schools, control of decisions about teaching and learning are shifting from the bureaucracy to teachers (i.e., professionals). From the parent and student perspective, this may be of little consequence. Both teachers and the bureaucracy are part of the formal education system exercising the predominant control over what happens in schools. Students and parents are being *served* by educators, rather than being actively engaged in determining and leading the school's course. When people are being served, they are typically defined by their needs or weaknesses, whereas when they are actively engaged, their assets and strengths are spotlighted.

People within the formal structure tend to think in terms of the community supporting the schools rather than the schools supporting the community. A consensual approach requires a mutual regard and trust between the school and community resulting in decisions that are based on commitment and meaning rather than control.

Each of these three models can operate in a school simultaneously, as separate spheres in some areas and overlapping in others. In the best-case scenario, each model is used for appropriate purposes, with effective communication providing the necessary connections among all three.

Re:Learning has started to move some teachers toward a more community-based approach through an increased emphasis on student exhibitions and cooperative learning, but often these techniques are implemented in a way that keeps the teacher in control. On the whole, parents and students are scarcely engaged in reform. It appears that unless the Coalition principles are used in a new way – namely, to build the consent and involvement of students and parents – the level of change will not be sufficient to crack the three barriers most constraining major improvements.

One possible approach to making this shift is to think in terms of "communities-within-a-community" rather than "schools-within-a-school." The "communities" would emphasize the assets of all their stakeholders and look at creative ways to reallocate time, tasks, and responsibilities among students, teachers, community members, parents, and administrators, and thereby crack the barriers that exist when a school is relatively impermeable to its community.

? What is next for the schools as they continue to improve student learning?

The culmination of this documentation period is an opportune time for the schools and their communities to reflect on their past experiences and consider their strategy for the future. The individual Re:Learning school reports highlight specific conditions, and this cross-site analysis provides a more global view.

Rich dialogue among members of the community and school in a setting of mutual trust, respect, and expectation is likely to be the best source of ideas for how to proceed. Possible questions to address during the dialogue include:

1. What professional development is needed to keep improving the quality of the implementation of the principles? How can professional development activities welcome the community?
2. For the most part, reform at the schools is still teacher-based. What would it look like if reform were student-based or community-based? Is this desired?
3. What relationships are needed among the school faculty, students, and the community to have the appropriate distribution of influence between the school and the community in determining the type of teaching and learning approaches to use in the school?

4. Should everyone in the school be expected to implement all nine common principles? What variations in implementation are beneficial, and which are not?

? How can other schools benefit from the experiences of these schools?

Although the school and composite reports are designed primarily as tools for the six Colorado Re:Learning schools, they may also be useful to other schools and communities embarking on change efforts or implementing standards-based education. The reports can serve as an impetus for stakeholders within a school and community to have a dialogue about school reform. Possible questions to discuss include:

1. What do you find most interesting in this report and why?
2. What implications do you see in the Re:Learning reports for your school-reform efforts? For efforts in your school or community to meet state standards?
3. What balance do you currently have between an institutional-based and community-based approach to reform? What adjustments would you like to make and how would you accomplish these changes?
4. What other reform initiatives and networks exist in the schools and the state with which it would be valuable to make connections?
5. What state or district policies and practices can be leveraged to support reform? Which ones need to be redesigned?
6. What changes have you made to address concerns here that might be of interest to the Re:Learning schools?

AND OVERALL?

The structures and processes that people in the Re:Learning schools are trying to change have been in place for nearly a century. How can people hope to bring about fundamental, lasting change in just a few years? Many of the changes we have examined in this report may well take 10 to 20 years to fully realize. In some cases, they are dependent on large groups of students and parents coming to understand what it means to be actively engaged in shaping the educational process, and a generation of teachers and administrators equipped with the instructional and organizational skills needed to create a richer, more productive teaching and learning environment. Changes will happen as incremental steps toward a larger goal.

The six schools involved in the Colorado Re:Learning initiative vary greatly in terms of size, structure, student demographics and educational philosophy – and each has approached the challenge of reform in a unique and dynamic way. All of them are trying to adjust to changing conditions and to better meet the distinctive needs of the families and communities they serve. Recognizing that there is no easy, clear-cut path to success, each of them has made good use of the Coalition ideas and principles to help guide their progress.

SECTION VII
IN CONCLUSION

Once the school and composite reports were in near-final form, a number of the principals and Re:Learning coordinators in the six schools met to discuss their dissemination. At that meeting, the group felt the composite report needed an additional chapter, not from the documenters, but from themselves. This chapter is based on that discussion. It was reviewed by the schools' current principals and Re:Learning coordinators, who agreed that it represents their collective view.

The completion of this documentation effort marks a time for us to reflect on our experiences with Re:Learning. The process has surfaced many key issues that need to be examined in more detail if our schools are to foster the kind of student learning we value.

Above all, our experience with Re:Learning has convinced us that changing schools in a fundamental and lasting way is a complex, time-consuming task – one that demands energy and commitment far beyond our initial expectations. We underestimated how difficult it would be to implement the nine common principles, and we learned that it is unrealistic to expect full, school-wide change within a four-year period.

Despite the difficulties, we remain committed to the original rationale for our involvement in Re:Learning – to create a learning environment where all students achieve excellence and become fully engaged in their education. When we began, we recognized that our students were not learning as much as they could and were not actively engaged in the school environment.

This documentation and our own experiences show us that teachers who have been actively involved in Re:Learning have gained immeasurably. They have learned much about how to teach today's students and, as a result, are setting higher expectations for students and expanding their own repertoire of teaching strategies. A core group remains strongly committed to continuing their efforts to reform schools to better serve the needs of students.

We are increasingly convinced that teachers need to use a range of instructional approaches to address all learning styles and meet the needs of diverse student populations. We expect to continue to encourage teachers to draw from multiple sources to improve their effectiveness.

We have learned how important it is to have all stakeholders actively involved in changing the way schools operate. Students, parents, and the community need to help educators rethink their priorities for learning. One way of doing this is through inclusionary ways of developing and implementing student standards. Re:Learning has encouraged high standards for students and given us ways to help all students reach those standards. We remain committed to using standards to improve student learning and parent/community involvement.

We have also gained new insight into the importance of respecting the diverse needs within a community when redesigning schools. We are learning that we cannot expect everyone to agree on one philosophy and that it is important for students and parents to have options.

And despite the fact that reform has resulted primarily in pockets of change rather than widespread change among all teachers and students, we are encouraged by the early indicators that there has been an impact on the quality and quantity of students' learning.

When we began our documentation effort, we decided to use traditional methods such as dropout rates and standardized tests as well as newer, performance-oriented measures. We also decided to measure school-wide change because we expected to achieve a broader impact than what actually occurred.

We now realize that we need to continue using many of the measures we initially decided to rely on, but to focus particularly on the clusters of teachers and students who are actively engaged in reform. When we began, we did not know which teachers would take hold of the new philosophy and methods or which changes would be most appropriate for our setting. We now have a much better sense of this.

In combination with district and state level work on standards and assessments, we are committed to becoming increasingly accountable for high levels of student learning. To this end, we plan to both continue the use of key existing measures and to use other, more authentic ways to measure the new learning that is occurring. To demonstrate the value of new teaching and learning approaches, we expect to disaggregate data to look at changes in clusters of students. Information in this report and experiences over the past four years have highlighted the importance of more focused documentation.

We are committed to strengthening accountability by using new types of performance assessments as well as more traditional measures

of student impact. We expect to use a varied approach to assessment which might include public exhibitions where community members become involved in judging the quality of student work. We support giving teachers the opportunity to spend more time reviewing student work to gain a deeper understanding of what students are really learning.

As we conclude, we want to recognize and validate the efforts of the many committed teachers, students, parents, administrators and other supporters who have spent time and energy well beyond the call of duty to engage in the tough job of changing the education system. We intend to expand the engagement of our communities in changing our schools. We also intend to continue to support teachers as they learn from one another and critically reflect on what is working and what is not as they create a learning environment where all students learn to use their minds well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, the staff and students of the six schools and their communities are acknowledged for the work they have done over the past four years focused on their commitment to improve their school. These pioneers provide educators, policymakers, and community members across the state and beyond with valuable insights into the challenges and benefits of reform. It is their experience that is the essence of this report. Many people in the schools contributed to the report by collecting, analyzing and reporting yearly data, participating in interviews, allowing the study team to observe classes, and responding to questionnaires. Special thanks go to the school principals and Re:Learning Coordinators for facilitation of the documentation effort.

The initial documentation plan was designed by the principals of the four schools funded by the Gates Family Foundation to implement the nine common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Wayne Martin, Director of the CDE Assessment Unit, assisted them in their design. Each school was responsible for gathering and reporting yearly data.

Don Watson of the Colorado Department of Education had overall responsibility for the grant from the Gates Family Foundation for this documentation study. He also was responsible for working with the schools over the four years to collect the measures of student impact. Additionally, he monitored the computer analysis of the student and teacher questionnaires. Beverly Anderson Parsons (Executive Director of InSites, a Colorado-based non-profit research and evaluation organization) and Carolyn Lupe (evaluation consultant) conducted the school visits, prepared and administered questionnaires, analyzed the data, and prepared the written reports. Suzanne Weiss served as editor for the reports. Carol Bosserman (InSites administrative assistant) was responsible for preparation of the reports. Layout and graphic design assistance was done by Melanie Metz and David Carlson.

The schools on which this report is based are Fort Lupton High School, Pagosa Springs High School, Pueblo County High School, Skyview High School, Horizon High School and Roaring Fork High School. The first four schools listed were the initial ones involved in Re:Learning in Colorado. Individual school reports are available directly from each of these four schools. For copies of this composite report, contact the Assessment Unit of the Colorado Department of Education.

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ENDNOTES

1 Money was granted to the Education Commission of the States which in turn made grants to schools. The schools/districts each contributed matching funds. In addition to the funds to the six schools, some grant money was spent on professional development activities to support Re:Learning statewide and some was given to other schools across the state to explore Re:Learning.

2 The documentation was supported by a separate grant from the Gates Family Foundation to the Colorado Department of Education.

3 The percentages given for each category are derived from a combination of interviews and teacher questionnaires. They are rough approximations.

4 This is also the case for schools-within-a-school, however, they face an additional challenge – communicating effectively with the rest of the school.

This document was published as a cooperative effort between the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the six Re:Learning schools in Colorado: Fort Lupton High School, Horizon High School, Pagosa Springs High School, Pueblo County High School, Roaring Fork High School, and Skyview High School.

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